

NAME: Mrs. Seno DATE OF BIRTH: 1889 PLACE OF BIRTH: Hiroshima
Age: 84 Sex: F Marital Status: W Education: Elementary School

PRE-WAR:

Date of arrival in U.S.: 1914 Age: 24 M.S. M Port of entry: San Fran.
Occupation/s: 1. Farmer 2. Housewife 3. _____
Place of residence: 1. Florin, California 2. _____ 3. _____
Religious affiliation: Christian Church
Community organizations/activities: _____

EVACUATION:

Name of assembly center: _____
Name of relocation center: Manzanita
Dispensation of property: sold Names of bank/s: _____
Jobs held in camp: 1. Kitchen helper 2. _____
Jobs held outside of camp: _____
Left camp to go to: Denver, Colorado

POST-WAR:

Date returned to West Coast: _____
Address/es: 1. Denver, Colorado (6 mos) 2. Florin, Ca.
3. Sacramento, California
Religious affiliation: Christian Church
Activities: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
If deceased, date, place and age at time of death: _____

Name of interviewer: Heihachiro Takarabe Date: 2/28/74 Place: Sacramento, Ca.

Translator: Maruko Megee

NAME: MRS. SENO

AGE: 84

BIRTHDATE: 22nd year of Meiji

BIRTH PLACE: Misazo-cho, Hiroshima

YEAR AND AGE WHEN CAME TO THE U.S.: 2nd year of Taishō,
24 years old

MAJOR OCCUPATION: Farming

RELOCATION CAMP: Manzanita

Interviewer: Heihachiro Takarabe

Interview Date: Feb. 28, 1974

Place of Interview: Sacramento, California

Translator: Mariko Magee

Typist:

NAME: MRS. SENO

Q: What's your name?

A: My name is Seno.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Misaza-cho, Hiroshima.

Q: Is that in the city of Hiroshima?

A: Yes, it is.

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born in the twenty-second year of Meiji.

Q: How old are you now?

A: I'm eighty-four years old.

Q: When did you come to the U.S.?

A: I came here in the second year of Taishō. It was
sixty years ago.

Q: How far did you go in school?

A: I attended a regular elementary school for four years.

Q: Do you remember your elementary school days?

A: I don't remember anything especially.

Q: Did you have fun?

A: No, not really.

Q: You liked school, didn't you?

A: Yes, I did. I just babysat my little brother, who was
two years old, after school.

Q: What was the most joyful thing for you during your school days?

A: It was fun to play with friends in the mountains and fields.

Q: What did you do in the mountains?

A: A friend of mine's house was located on a mountain. She and I played and babysat simultaneously.

Q: Did you just babysit?

A: Yes. Both of us held babies on our backs and played.

Q: Do you remember your teacher?

A: Yes, I do. Our first teacher was Mr. Ohtani, who was twenty-one years old at that time. We had a female teacher for the third and fourth year of elementary school.

Q: Were your teachers strict?

A: No, they weren't too strict. The elementary school education was extended from four to six years after I had graduated from elementary school. I wanted to go to school for two more years. Both my brother, who was in the Army, and my sister encouraged me to go to school. However, I gave it up. My father was planning to leave for the U.S., and I was expected to help my mother after my father's departure.

Q: How old were you at that time?

A: I was twelve years old. My father left Japan in May after I had graduated from elementary school.

Q: Do you remember your father?

A: Yes, I do.

Q: What kind of person was he?

A: He didn't scold us unreasonably. He took good care of us.

Q: Did you babysit even after graduating from elementary school?

A: I learned to sew.

Q: Your father left Japan when you were twelve years old. Did your mother then work outside of the home?

A: No, she didn't. She had a weaving business at home. My aunt, who was a textile dealer, sold my mother's products. My father worked as a railroad worker. He got injured very badly in an accident at work. It was on the sixth of December. Though he was injured seriously, he insisted on walking back to his camp. He stopped three times on the way to go back to the camp and vomitted each time. A cook from the camp notified a friend of my father's, with whom my father had sailed to the U.S. The friend was a re-entree. He carried my father to a railroad hospital; however, my father passed away at five a.m. on the following morning.

Q: That's too bad. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

A: I have two brothers and three sisters.

Q: What number are you among the six children in your family?

A: I was the fourth child. Some acquaintances urged me to leave for the U.S., but my mother didn't want me to do

A: so. Trusting a go-between who was one of our relatives. I married Seno. The relative said that Seno, who had been to the U.S. before, wouldn't return there again. Seno returned to the U.S. six months after we were married. I was alone in Japan for three years. Seno finally persuaded me to join him in the U.S. I didn't want to come to the U.S.; on the other hand, I didn't want to cause my mother to worry about my marriage.

Q: How old were you when you came to the U.S.?

A: I was twenty-one years old.

Q: What had you been doing until you got married?

A: I had been helping my brother with his business since I was thirteen. My brother dyed the Yamamai fabrics yellow. I studied sewing whenever his business was slow--in April, May and June.

Q: Who was your go-between?

A: My cousin's husband and his uncle were our go-betweens. I found them to be liars later.

Q: Did you get angry when you found out the truth that Mr. Seno was planning to return to the U.S.?

A: I didn't feel happy about it, but I couldn't do anything. I found myself pregnant after Seno had left Japan. The baby was born dead. My brother told me, "It sounds reasonable for you to divorce Seno, for he told you a lie." However, human society doesn't work that way.

Q: You came to the U.S. three years later than Mr. Seno, didn't you?

A: Yes, I did. I was called by Seno.

Q: Was it sixty years ago?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Then, it was in 1914, wasn't it?

A: I believe so.

Q: What kind of people were on board the ship?

A: Most of the passengers were picture-brides and those who were going to re-enter the U.S. It took thirteen days to get to San Francisco.

Q: What was life on the boat like?

A: The boat rolled very much. A room-service boy said that it was rare for a boat to roll so much. I didn't get seasick, though.

Q: Did anything special happen during the voyage?

A: No, nothing special happened.

Q: Did you have any kind of examination on Angel Island?

A: Yes, we did. We had a physical examination. We were also asked many questions there.

Q: What kind of questions were you asked?

A: Well, I can't remember.

Q: How long did you stay on Angel Island?

A: We stayed there for three or four days.

Q: Where did you go from Angel Island?

A: Mr. Seno picked me up and took me to Florin. We produced grapes and strawberries there until the war broke out.

Q: Did Mr. Seno own a farm?

A: Yes, he did. He had a 10-acre farm. Our children helped us a lot. Mr. Seno wanted to enlarge his farm and bought a 15-acre farm of mowing grass. Strawberries didn't grow well there. It took a few years for us to succeed in producing grapes. However, the price of grapes had dropped by that time. Mr. Seno and I, with so many children, were at a loss.

Q: Was it during the depression?

A: I'm sure it was. We dug out all of the grape trees.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: We have seven children. Having a large family, we couldn't live on Seno's income alone. But it was impossible for us to get employed by somebody as a family. We finally decided to sell the farm. The war broke out before long, and we moved to an assembly center.

Q: Did you produce only grapes and strawberries?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you imagine the U.S. would be like when you were in Japan?

A: I never imagined that I would have such a hard life. I didn't want to come to the U.S. in the first place.

Q: Was it because your father had died in the U.S.?

A: No. Apart from his death, I just didn't want to come here.

Q: How long did you stay in San Francisco?

A: I stayed there for a week.

Q: What was your first impression of the U.S.?

A: I didn't have a first impression or anything like that.
I just stayed in a hotel with some other Japanese people.

Q: How did white people treat you?

A: Not being able to speak English, we didn't have direct contact with white people. When we sold the grapes and strawberries to white businessmen, we talked to them through interpreters. Sometimes we were deceived by middlemen. There weren't any educated people around there.

Q: What was the hardest problem in your life?

A: Everyday living was very difficult. Our life was the hardest in 1933. We sold our grapes to a company owned by white people, in October. They didn't buy anything from us till the following March. We sold a little to Mr. Tanigawa, who owned a store. We didn't know how to make ends meet. In the midst of our trouble, Mr. Yamada from Sacramento came over and gave us five sacks of rice, dried sea-slug and some red beets. He said that we could survive on them until the company resumed their business with us. I still visit Mr. Yamada's grave once in a while and thank him for all the kindness he showed us in those days. Though we didn't have any meat or fish, we had enough rice every day during the depression. None of our children got sick. Since we couldn't afford bread, I fixed rice-balls for our children to take out to school. Mr. Yamada gave me sake-lees, and I made vegetables preserved in sake-lees.

Q: How much rice was in each sack?

A: There was one hundred kilograms of rice in each sack.

Mr. and Mrs. Yamada led us and our children to Christianity. They took us to church in their truck every Sunday. The Sakakibaras, the Shigenos and the Murakamis were all our church friends. The people living on the other side of the street were all Buddhists. I'm grateful to the Lord for giving us the opportunity to live among Christians on this side of the street. My Christian friends encouraged me to join a ladies' association at church. A friend of mine who was a member of the Salvation Army told me about Reverend Baba from Oxnard. Reverend Baba was planning to give a sermon. The friend took us to listen to the sermon in his truck. At the end of the sermon, Reverend Baba gave us a blessing. As soon as I got his blessing, I started feeling heavy in my head. This lasted for a few days. At the same time, I found myself in tears all of the time. I didn't wish to die with my children any longer. One night, the friend visited me to see how I was doing. He was told by Reverend Baba to visit me. Reverend Baba believed that I was to be saved by the Lord. I didn't want to attend the Salvation Army meeting any more, for I was afraid that I might feel too moved to control my tears. However, I went to the meeting on the following Sunday. When Reverend Baba gave me a blessing, I felt as if lukewarm water had been poured over me from head to toe.

A: I was happier than ever before, after that. My husband had been suffering from apoplexy for thirteen years. One evening in December, I fed him dinner in his bed as usual. While I was eating my dinner, I was called by him twice. I told him to let me finish eating dinner. When I entered his room after dinner, I saw him sitting on his bed. He looked beside himself. I laid him down and went to bed. On the following morning, I saw him lying unconsciously. Though I called for a doctor in the morning, none came till evening. The doctor said that a vein in Mr. Seno's brain was broken. I was told to observe Mr. Seno's condition overnight and send him to a hospital if his condition wasn't any better. I called an ambulance on the following morning and sent Seno to a hospital. He didn't talk. He couldn't eat or drink by himself. He died after thirty-seven days.

Q: When was it?

A: It was seven years ago. It was on the third of October.

Q: What was your greatest pleasure in life in those days?

A: I had none. A church was established when my oldest child was five. Attending church was the only pleasure I had. Reverend Suda gave me a ride.

Q: What else made you unhappy?

A: I was unhappy about my life itself. However, I appreciated having the Lord's protection.

Q: Did you want to return to Japan at that time?

A: Yes, I did, for my mother was sick in bed. On the other

A: hand, I wondered if we could survive in Japan. In 1961, my children urged me to return to Japan. Mr. Seno was sick, but his doctor said that Mr. Seno should be all right. I went back to Japan with my grandson for two months.

Q: Could Japanese people buy land at that time?

A: No, we couldn't. We registered our three children's names when we bought the property. Japanese people could purchase property when Mr. Seno bought the 10-acre farm. Our three children were the legal purchasers of the 15-acre farm.

Q: Did your children attend a segregated school?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: I took it for granted, because Japanese children at that time didn't speak English well.

Q: What did you think when you heard of the Pearl Harbor attack?

A: I worried about Japan.

Q: What did your husband say about it?

A: He said that Japan had done a terrible thing. We couldn't do anything about it, though.

Q: Were you afraid what might happen to you?

A: Yes, I was.

Q: What was your evacuation like?

A: We didn't have too many household things in the first place. Mr. and Mrs. Brown, a neighbor family, helped

A: us a lot. They moved to Sacramento, and an Italian family moved in. The Italian family was nice, too. It was this family that bought our land. I was just grateful to the Lord for letting such a large family as ours survive.

Q: Do you remember Mr. and Mrs. Brown well?

A: Yes, I do. They gave us various things when we were starving.

Q: Was Mr. Brown a college professor?

A: I heard that he used to teach at some college.

Q: Where were you evacuated to?

A: We stayed in the (Manzanita) Camp. (manzanita?)

Q: What was it like?

A: Well . . . we lived in relative comfort.

Q: The hut you lived in was rough, wasn't it?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: What did you feel about being evacuated to a camp?

A: Having been near starvation before the evacuation, we didn't feel miserable about our camp life.

Q: What do you remember about the camp?

A: I just attended church regularly. I worked as a kitchen helper from early morning till evening.

Q: What did Mr. Seno do?

A: He and Mr. Sakakibara also worked in the kitchen.

Q: Did anything unusual occur in the camp?

A: I don't recall anything unusual.

Q: Did you move to any other camp from (Manzanita)?

A: No. We stayed there for three years until we moved to Denver for our children's education. We chose Denver, because we had acquaintances there. Our children attended school, and I worked at a hotel.

Q: How long did you stay in Denver?

A: I stayed there only six months. One of our daughters, who left the camp before us, was working in Washington D.C. She was going to marry a man in Florin. Therefore, we returned to Florin. Mr. Seno was so happy back in Florin that he didn't want to go to Denver again. I only had two weeks off from my work, but I gave up on going back to Denver.

Q: What did you do with your things in Denver?

A: There were two daughters left in Denver. One of them was about to graduate from high school. They came back to Florin together after finishing school. The one who graduated from high school in Denver entered a business college in Sacramento. She is married and has three children, but she is still working for a city public office here.

Q: When did you return to Florin? You returned to Florin after the war, didn't you?

A. Yes, we did.

Q: Did you come back to your old house?

A: No. We had already sold our house. The Italian family rented us their (boy's house) for two months. Then, we

A: moved to a church hall. We divided the hall with our things. We lived there and found employment outside. One of our sons, who was released from the Army when we were in Denver, was with us there. He came back to Florin with us because of his sister's wedding. He moved to some other place for his schooling, but he came back to us later.

Q: Had you sold your property before you were evacuated?

A: Our property was up for sale for a long time. A year or so before we left the camp, the Italian family bought it. When we returned to Florin, they asked me if we wanted to own the property again. We didn't intend to grow fruits in Florin again.

Q: Did you sell both the 10-acre and 15-acre farms?

A: Yes. We sold 25 acres altogether. Two of our daughters were unmarried and one son couldn't find job anywhere. Then, he decided to stay in Sacramento and become a gardener.

Q: Do you remember the loyalty problem?

A: I'm sorry, but I don't remember.

Q: What did you think about the Nisei going to war?

A: I thought it inevitable for them to go to war.

Q: Did anybody condemn you for sending your sons to the war?

A: No. Everybody on our block was from Florin. Nobody said anything impolite to anyone else.

Q: People knew one another well, didn't they? Did you have a hard time finding a job?

A: Most of the Japanese people in Florin worked on a 50-acre strawberry farm owned by a white man. I worked at (Fox) Ranch for two years whenever they needed laborers for cutting tendrils.

Q: How long did you stay at the church hall?

A: We stayed there for two-and-a-half years. We kept our eyes for an affordable house of our own. In the meantime, we heard that the church hall was to be closed down before long. One of our daughters and her husband, who was a member of the Salvation Army, were planning to come to live with us. Therefore, we bought a house at last.

Q: How many families were there at the church hall?

A: There were seven families altogether including two families living in the Japanese language school in the rear.

Q: Did you just divide the hall with your things?

A: That's right.

Q: How many people were there in your family at that time?

A: There were five people in our family. Later on, we moved to a Sunday school classroom downstairs.

Q: How old was your youngest child?

A: He was a college student at that time.

Q: What did you think of white people then?

A: Not knowing any white people personally, I didn't experience direct segregation. Living among the Japanese people in Florin, I didn't feel I was in the

A: U.S. I spoke Japanese all of the time and shopped at Japanese stores. Many Japanese people moved to Florin relying on their friends for help.

Q: Did Florin change after the war?

A: No, I didn't think so. But most of our friends didn't come back to Florin after the war. Some went to Los Angeles, others returned to Japan. It was rather easy to deal with a wholesale company in Florin, for the company had interpreters for us.

Q: I understand that you had been deceived by middlemen. Were they Japanese?

A: Yes, they were. We belonged to a grape producer's association and transferred to an individual enterprise, because the price of grapes was cheap among the members. We dealt with the wholesale company for ten years, but we had to stop dealing with them at the end. We consulted Mr. Ishikawa, president of the Japanese Association in Florin, about it. We reached the depths of poverty. Thinking back, I'm sure that I was given my Christian faith through hardship. We ate just to kill our hunger; we never ate anything nutritious.

Q: Did you grow vegetables, too?

A: Yes, we did. We ate vegetables all right. We couldn't afford any meat and fish during the six months we were poorest. Not even the wholesale company loaned us money during those six months.

Q: Did white businessmen own the company?

A: Yes, they did. The farmers dealing with them were all

A: Japanese, though.

Q: Did you feel happy to be in the U.S.?

A: Never. Being close to starvation all of the time, I wasn't happy in the U.S. I believe that I came to the U.S. according to the Lord's will rather than my own. I didn't even catch a cold during such a severe winter season. The Lord must have been protecting me. I remember it was awfully cold on the way back home from the Salvation Army meeting. One wife attempted suicide. She gave rat poison to her two children and took it herself, too. Her husband found them groaning and carried them to a hospital. One of the children died on the way to the hospital and the other one died at the hospital. The wife was saved. Later, she was sent to a mental hospital in Stockton. Reverend Kobayashi visited her very often. She told me that she had felt nauseated at the dinner table every day and that she had been awoken to the Christian faith while watching a sunset one evening. She didn't feel nauseated any more after that. She begged to be released from the institution so that she could contribute something toward saving other people like herself. At first, she was taken to the Salvation Army in San Francisco. Having stayed there for nine months, she came back to Florin. She worked on a grape ranch. One day she came over to see me. She looked much healthier than before. Though her husband wasn't wealthy, he bought a big truck

A: and took his wife to a meeting at the Salvation Army every Sunday.

Q: Were they the ones who gave you a lot of rice?

A: No, they weren't. It was Mr. and Mrs. Yamada who gave us rice. They were in our neighborhood.

Q: I see. Talking about the other woman, I wonder what made her attempt suicide. Was it because she was in the depths of poverty?

A: Not really. The direct cause of her attempted suicide was her brother-in-law. Her brother-in-law and his wife didn't have any children; therefore, they were free to work outside as much as they wanted. On the contrary, she was too busy with her children to work as much as other people worked. She had to clean the kitchen after breakfast every morning before going out to help on the ranch. Her brother-in-law and his wife didn't like her to come out late for work. One morning, while she was working in the kitchen, her brother-in-law came and hit her. Being modest, she didn't know what to do and attempted suicide with her children.

Q: Did you hear any other stories like that?

A: No, I didn't.

Q: There weren't too many Japanese women in the U.S. at that time, were there?

A: Well, there were quite a few Japanese women in Florin.

Q: Was there a gambling house in Florin?

A: No, there wasn't. Some people played "flower-cards"

A: during the winter season, though. The gambling house in Sacramento was the closest one to Florin. Single Japanese men complained that they had their money taken by the "long-haired guys."

Q: What do you mean by the "long-haired guys"?

A: I mean Chinese people.

Q: I see.

A: I'm not the only Issei that experienced hardships. I'm grateful to our Lord for leading such a small person as myself.

Q: Well, shall we conclude? Thank you very much for your cooperation.